

NSC BRIEFING

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CONFIDENTIAL

4 April 1956

CAMBODIA

- I. Prince Sihanouk's resignation.
- II. Dap Chhuon letter:
 - A. Waiting chance reverse trend.
 - B. Chhuon formerly loyal.
- III. Other "oppositionists": Royal Councillor Penn Nouth, Bank Director Son Sann, General Tioulong.
- IV. Sihanouk poses as martyr.
 - A. Indicates difficulties with neighbors result American "pressure".
 - B. Plausibility of charge.
- V. Peiping offer of US \$5,000,000.
- VI. Sihanouk sulking:
 - A. Khim Tit new PM, but Sihanouk still the power.
- VII. Conclusion: Sihanouk's removal would not improve things.

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State Dept. review completed

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CAMBODIA

1. Prince Sihanouk's resignation from the premiership last week may well have reflected in part his awareness of growing opposition to his autocratic and mercurial rule.

2. In a confidential letter to US Ambassador McClintock, Dap Chhuon--an ex-rebel who is now a powerful provincial governor and whose troops make up the palace guard--has asserted he is awaiting an opportunity to "frustrate" the Prince's present policies and to declare a "diplomatic rupture" with Communist countries. Chhuon heretofore had been regarded as fanatically loyal to Sihanouk.

3. Other prominent Cambodians, including royal councillor Penn Nouth and national bank director Son Sann, have also recently seen fit to disagree more or less publicly with the Prince, possibly in an effort to undermine Sihanouk's position. Son Sann recently ignored Sihanouk's order to release counterpart funds to pay for military expenses--the first known instance of such direct disobedience. Sihanouk's influential uncle and former defense minister, General Tioulong, has also recently reiterated his dissatisfaction with the Prince's rule.

4. Sihanouk's public explanation of reasons for his resignation have referred to difficulties with South Vietnam and Thailand and indicated they are the result of American dissatisfaction with the *PRINCE'S POLICY OF* neutralism. This self-portrait in the role of a martyr poses a difficult problem for his opponents. Allegations of American "pressure" on Cambodians--a theme avidly disseminated

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sound plausible to Cambodians, especially since the disputes with Bangkok and Saigon have intensified coincidentally with Sihanouk's vocal espousal of neutralism.

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6. Sihanouk is presently sulking in his palace at Siem Riep. The new Cambodian government, headed by the moderate, pro-West Khim Tit, should temporarily stabilize the situation. Sihanouk for the present nonetheless remains the most powerful single individual in Cambodia and exercises effective control whether in or out of office.

7. Conclusion: The removal of Sihanouk from Cambodia's politics in the near future, far from improving things, would probably bring in a government lacking popular support.